

**PROPOSED USE OF THE PLENARY POWERS TO PRESERVE THE GENERIC NAME "ELAPHE" FITZINGER, 1833 (CLASS REPTILIA)**By **ROBERT MERTENS**

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The object of the present application is to ask the International Commission to use its Plenary Powers to prevent the well-known generic name *Elaphe* Fitzinger, 1833 (Class Reptilia) from disappearing as a junior subjective synonym of the generic name *Gonyosoma* Wagler, 1828. The facts of this case are set out in the following paragraphs.

2. Attention was drawn to this problem by Malcolm Smith in 1943 (*Fauna Brit. Ind. Ceylon, Burma*, Rept. & Amph. 3 : 139, 141), who, when dealing with the Indian species of the genus *Elaphe* Fitzinger, 1833, wrote as follows :— "I cannot find any morphological characters by which to distinguish *Gonyosoma* Wagler, 1828, type *viride*=*oxycephala*, from the species usually placed under *Elaphe* Fitzinger, 1833. *Gonyosoma* therefore should stand as the name of the genus". In view, however, of the disturbance in current practice which this change of name would have caused, Malcolm Smith retained the generic name *Elaphe* Fitzinger.

3. According to current taxonomic views *Elaphe parreyssii* Wagler, 1833, the type species of *Elaphe* Fitzinger, 1833, by monotypy, is a junior subjective synonym of *Coluber sauromates* Pallas, [1814], which is currently treated as being a subspecies of *Coluber quatuorlineatus* Lacépède, 1789, and *Gonyosoma viride* Wagler, 1828, the type species, by monotypy, of *Gonyosoma* Wagler, 1828, is a junior subjective synonym of *Coluber oxycephalus* Boie, 1827. Further it is currently considered that *Coluber quatuorlineatus* Lacépède and *Coluber oxycephalus* are congeneric with one another. Thus, as observed by Malcolm Smith, the name *Elaphe* Fitzinger, 1833, is a junior subjective synonym of *Gonyosoma* Wagler, 1828.

4. The substitution of the name *Gonyosoma* for *Elaphe* would be very troublesome and confusing in view of the large number of *Elaphe* forms, including nine in Europe alone, thirty-three in Asia and sixteen in North and Central America. The disturbance which would be caused by this change in name would affect check lists and numerous taxonomic and faunistic works.

5. In order to prevent the undesirable results indicated above, it is proposed that the International Commission should use its Plenary Powers to suppress the name *Gonyosoma* Wagler, thus providing the name *Elaphe* Fitzinger with an unchallengeable position.

6. The following are the original references for the names cited in the present application :—

*Elaphe* Fitzinger, 1833, in Wagler, *Descr. Icon. Amph.* (3) : expl. pl. 27  
*Gonyosoma* Wagler, 1828, *Descr. Icon. Amph.* (1) : expl. pl. 9  
*oxycephalus*, *Coluber*, Boie, 1827, *Isis* (Oken) 1827 : 537  
*parreyssii*, *Elaphe*, Wagler, 1833, *Descr. Icon. Amph.* (3) : expl. pl. 27  
*quatuorlineatus*, *Coluber*, Lacépède, 1789, *Hist. nat. Quadrup. ovip. Serpens* 2 : 82  
*sauromates*, *Coluber*, [1814], *Zoographia rosso-asiat.* 3 : 42  
*viride*, *Gonyosoma*, Wagler, 1828, *Descr. Icon. Amph.* (3) : expl. pl. 9

7. The genus *Elaphe* Fitzinger is not the type genus of a taxon belonging to any category in the family-group.

8. In the application now submitted the International Commission is asked :—

- (1) to use its Plenary Powers to suppress the generic name *Gonyosoma* Wagler, 1828, for the purposes of the Law of Priority but not for those of the Law of Homonymy ;
- (2) to place the under-mentioned generic name on the *Official List of Generic Names in Zoology* :—*Elaphe* Fitzinger, 1833 (gender : feminine) (type species, by monotypy : *Elaphe parreyssii* Wagler, 1832) ;
- (3) to place the under-mentioned specific names on the *Official List of Specific Names in Zoology* :—
  - (a) *oxycephalus* Boie, 1827, as published in the combination *Coluber oxycephalus* ;
  - (b) *quatuorlineatus* Lacépède, 1789, as published in the combination *Coluber quatuorlineatus* ;
  - (c) *sauromates* Pallas, 1814, as published in the combination *Coluber sauromates* ;
- (4) to place the under-mentioned generic name on the *Official Index of Rejected and Invalid Generic Names in Zoology* : *Gonyosoma* Wagler, 1828, as suppressed under the Plenary Powers under (1) above.